Synthesised Policy Recommendations relevant to rural-urban interactions and interdependencies

ROBUST Deliverable 6.3

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In this paper we have set out a series of policy recommendations arising from the work and findings of the ROBUST project and arrived at over a period of four and half years between June 2017 and November 2021. It draws, in particular, upon what has been done in the context of eleven Living Labs across ten current or former EU member states.

When we talk about policy recommendations, we mean to infer recommendations that are directly related to, or relevant to, the policy level. We have deliberately refrained from using the term "policy makers" and referred instead to "policy actors". We have done to reflect the hope that what we say is of value and interest not only to those who actually make policy but also to those who are involved in its governance, its delivery or its monitoring, or indeed those who study and analyse policy from a research, or general interest, starting point.

In the first section of the paper, we have grouped numbered series of recommendations (numbers have been used for the purposes of ease of reference), under the topic areas of each of the five ROBUST Communities of Practice (CoPs). Each of these CoPs has in turn been working with a number of participants from different ROBUST Living labs, themselves working in combination with a large range of local stakeholders. In that sense we hope that there is a "golden thread" between the front-line experimentation and research work that has been done within the project and the report itself as one of a series of deliverables within Work Package 6 of ROBUST and where the focus point is itself policy. Where the work of the CoPs seemed to us to fall into more than one distinct sub-category, we have rearranged the recommendation lists accordingly into sub-sections.

An additional sub-section has been added to the first section of the paper in order to provide a further short series of recommendations, this time relating to wellbeing and the currently evolving policy debate around wellbeing economy as a sustainable alternative to more traditional economic (growth) models. This seemed worthwhile given the importance that has come to be attached to wellbeing over the course of the project as our thoughts and findings have emerged and being synthesised. The elements highlighted here apply across all five CoP areas and make overt reference to a number of ongoing EU level policy developments in this highly topical subject area.

In the second section of the paper, we have turned our attention to a selected number of individual EU level policy instruments and offered a more focused series of recommendations with regard to each, attempting to show where we felt that the project's work had particular potential relevance and value to bring to bear in the ongoing implementation of those particular policy measures.

The original intention when shaping the ROBUST project and planning this paper was very much focused on what was then the overarching EU policy framework – EU 2020, with its attendant focus on economic growth and jobs. The lifetime of ROBUST has coincided with a time of significant policy shifts at EU level and with the adoption of the European Green Deal as a new policy framework and the notion of twin transitions – green and digital – as means to arrive at a climate-neutral continent by 2050. The foci within the final version of this report reflect the changes of policy framework and orientation over the lifetime of the project.

The final dimension which cannot be ignored, and which has coincided with the last two years or so of the ROBUST project and has affected its own work and ways of working, has been the Covid-19 outbreak. With regard to the outbreak and its ongoing impacts we have worked relevant considerations into the lists of recommendations for each CoP area. In the second section where we address specific policy measures all of which themselves either evolved during the time of the outbreak or have been n

some way adapted to take account of those impacts, we have taken the same embedded approach. We have also deliberately included a short section here on *NextGenerationEU* itself a specific response to the pandemic – although, as it is itself quick to remind us, more than simply a recovery plan.

Climate, Nature and Environment

Ecosystem services

On the basis of the work and findings of the ROBUST project we make the following series of policy-related recommendations with regards to ecosystems services.

1. The whole binary notion of rural and urban is in many ways problematic and greater nuance is needed to capture territorial realities. That, however, should be regarded as a parallel concern as opposed to a basis for paralysing more specific work to be carried out by policy actors in the area of rural-urban ESS

2. ESS in a rural-urban context warrants close attention on the part of policy actors given the important role played by ESS as a form of rural-urban (indeed rural – peri-urban – rural) flow. The basic conceptualisation here needs to be one about multi-directional and circular flow of services rooted on an interdependency between a continuum of territories of different kinds

3. Indeed, we would go as far as to suggest to policy actors and others that are ESS are a crucial element in ensuring and sharing benefits across different types of territories, highlighting as they do the ecological interdependence of rural and urban territories.

4. That might usefully be emphasised by policy actors as part of message shaping during the process of devising cross-cutting and multidisciplinary instruments such as regional development strategies as well as in undertaking more focused "sectoral" work

5. Recognition of the ways in which in ESS is based upon rural-urban interdependency and can serve to share benefits between rural and urban areas, might be taken a step further by both policy actors and practitioners if grasped as an opportunity to develop synergies between rural and urban, and policy actors in particular might ask themselves how policy can be shaped to support trajectories toward such synergies

6. That in turn points up the critical importance of not regarding rural areas as the sole provider of ESS. The very proximity (and blending) of rural, peri-urban and rural areas makes any such uni-directional understanding of ESS provision a false premise to be actively refuted

7. It follows that the role and potential of urban and peri-urban areas extends a long way beyond being solely consumers of ESS and their benefits and that needs to be explicitly recognised and acted upon

8. ESS operate across administrative boundaries (obviously) as much as they flow across different types of territories within or across such boundaries. That raises multiple implications in terms of cross-border (and here we are talking not only of course about national borders, although that will add another dimension of complexity), in terms of actions and the governance arrangements

9. The point about working across boundaries also raises issues in terms of scale - data and information about ESS is only fully captured by mapping at multiple scales and policy actors will want to ensure that interventions ensure that this happens, and the results used in the most effective ways

10. This has equally obvious implications for both policy actors and practitioners in the context of how collaborative working is arranged and underpinned by efficient network governance arrangements at multiple levels

11. Policy actors are encouraged to develop ways in which rural-urban communities can be supported and enabled to come together with each and have a meaningful involvement in rural-urban ESS

12. Community members and others with a direct interest have a key role to play and should be given some sort of meaningful "ownership" of rural-urban ESS, be this done through the development of community partnerships or similar, or through other means, where their potential role in scenario planning, priority-setting, and mediating between multiple interests can be optimised

13. Where gaps exist at the policy-research-practice levels with regard to rural-urban ESS, policy actors at senior levels are encouraged to better coordination and cooperation so that gaps might be replaced by virtuous circles of better informed ongoing interventions

14. Policy actors and others need to pay continued and special attention to Payments for Ecosystems Schemes (PES) in general but also to the particular ways in which they might operate most effectively in a rural-urban context

15. More research is required to arrive at a better information and evidence base to inform how such schemes might best operate in specifically rural-urban contexts given the place-sensitivity of such initiatives

16. The same observation as above with regard to the importance of community involvement and "ownership" applies to PES as much as it does to ESS arrangements more broadly

17. The Living Lab approach as adopted within the ROBUST project has gone some way to demonstrate the value and importance of detailed, localised work done collaboratively and, in a place-sensitive way, it is a small-scale evidence base to date, but their work is there to be drawn upon, explored, and exploited by policy actors.

Ecosystem Services and Spatial Planning

With more specific regard to the relationship between ESS and spatial planning regimes, the following list of policy recommendations is offered to complement the more general points immediately above:

1. Land use and land take decisions are a key driver in determining the nature of ESS. As such spatial planning has a key, and integral, role to play in terms of the actual and potential nature and contribution of ESS across all kinds of territories, rural, peri-urban and urban

2. This is often, and quite reasonably, thought of in the context of managing urbanisation, and changes in land use in areas where rural and urban spaces are proximitous. This is of particular importance and relevance , but policy actors should not limit their focus to that one dimension

3. The central importance of land use and planning processes and the policy frameworks within which they are shaped needs therefore to be clearly recognised and understood

4. ESS should be a crucial factor in making decisions about land use, but this is not always sufficiently designed into the structure of spatial planning processes – a shortcoming of which policy actors should take urgent note

5. This is in turn implies an equally urgent need to review and correct any instances where the two things are insufficiently connected in terms of legal and regulatory frameworks, and ways of working

6. This should apply in particular at the levels of impact assessment and risk management but across all dimensions of spatial planning process

7. There needs at the same time to be a greater emphasis placed upon the ways in which spatial planning processes can support the better bundling of EES in given locations

8. Spatial planning regimes will require the right sorts of place-sensitive policy frameworks within which to operate which enable them to undertake a central role in the multi-scale mapping, data and knowledge collection referred to in the list of recommendations immediately preceding this one

9. The policy level support required will also need to extend to enabling them to work (in conjunction with others) on the ongoing long-term monitoring of the impacts of different types of land management on ESS

10. That should itself also be a two-way process with the measurable impacts of ESS used to inform land management decisions

11. Spatial planning decisions need to be made in an inclusive ways with governance arrangements in place to support that. As well as planning professionals, it will be necessary to ensure that landowners and land managers are closely and meaningfully involved in decision-making process regarding land-use and ESS in an rural-urban context as much as any other

12. That implies particular challenges, of which policy actors will want to take due account given the exceptionally high levels of mixed land ownership and land fragmentation in areas where rural and urban territories are proximate

13. And, in this regard special attention should be paid to be the best ways to organise and incentivise cooperation between landowners and land managers across mixed rural-urban settings

14. Spatial planning is itself spatial, with regimes operating at local (municipal, if preferred), regional and national levels. Each might – and ought – concern itself with rural-urban ESS and there should be vertical congruence between these different levels ensured through policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks as appropriate on a case by case, place by place basis

15. Green infrastructure (GI) will sit within the ambit of spatial planning, its particular applicability and value in the rural-urban ESS context needs to be recognised and emphasised by policy actors both at the level of detail and within broader regional development strategies and similar

16. That applicability and relevance for rural-urban GI includes particular contexts such as river (basin) management and flood plain maintenance but should also be recognised – and its value promoted – in overlapping contexts such as the restoration of mineral sites and waste management sites, disproportionately situated in locations where rural and urban settings are proximitous

17. The importance for policy actors and others of optimising the design and operation of PES has been referred to in the previous, more general, series of recommendations above, the key role of spatial planning regimes in such schemes needs to be considered and better developed

Culture, creativity and tourism

Culture and creativity

The ROBUST *Cultural Connections* CoP concluded at an early stage of its work that understandings of what constitute" culture" vary considerably from context to context and from place to place. That needs to be recognised as the first recommendation listed below suggests, but need not, and should not, prevent valuable work being done in exploring the nature and potential of rural-urban cultural connections. Culture is an area of human activity and life which is widely perceived to have both intrinsic and applied value – whether that application be related to traditions and heritage and hence community- and place-specific identity, culture as an economic sector, culture related to leisure and

recreation, to education and personal development or to creative/artistic endeavour per se. Here as elsewhere ROBUST has sought to explore all those possible applications in a more specific rural-urban context.

1. Policy actors are encouraged to take account of varying definitions of culture when addressing this subject, being aware that those different understandings and conceptualisations themselves reflect the breadth and overlapping nature of the subject

2. At the same time as acknowledging and embracing different conceptualisations over time, in different places and in different contexts, policy actors will wish to not ignore or underplay the value of culture simply because its exact meaning - and hence scale - is often difficult to capture in absolute terms

3. The work and findings of the ROBUST *Cultural Connections* CoP underline the importance of culture in a place context: of the ways in which culture shapes places of different types, shapes local and regional identities and "sense of place" and becomes inseparable from it

4. Policy actors are directed towards the work of ROBUST in particular in the context of rural and urban and encouraged to take forward its findings in terms of how culture is directly entwined with perceptions of what makes rural, rural, and what makes urban, urban

5. What is valued and valuable about both rural and urban cultures and makes them distinct and particular deserves recognition, protection and support at the policy level but

6. However, exactly at the same time and without any internal contradiction, policy actors might take a leading role in the debate about places and culture by focusing attention on cultural connections between rural and urban places, actors and interests

7. There is a particular, and therefore important, responsibility at the policy level to ensure that these rural-urban cultural connection happen in ways that are not injurious to either, that bring mutual and added balance to both and which develop synergies

8. Against which might be set the corollary, to which policy actors' special attention is drawn, that neither urban nor rural culture is static, or unimpacted upon one by other, or indeed wholly distinct or different one from the other

9. There are, and long have been flows of people, works, ideas and knowledge, between rural and urban areas, and policy actors will want to ensure that that is understood and is supported to continue in optimal ways

10. There is work to be done and supported at the policy level in creating a better understanding of rural and urban culture and the interrelations and interdependencies between them, and in particular to ensure that creative endeavour is not overly (and hence inaccurately) over-associated with urban environments

11. Coordination between rural and urban culture is essential, and is a key responsibility of policy actors at different levels. This coordination defends distinctiveness, but at the same time encourages collaboration between cultural actors, looks to share resource fairly, and looks to develop attractive and accessible cultural offers of intrinsic value in and across places of different types

12. There exists a particular challenge for policy actors in helping to ensure that what is perceived of as rural culture - often strongly associated with historical survivals – is at the same time "living": vibrant and evolving, and encouraged to be evolving, as opposed to static and a prisoner of its own past

13. That in turn is one pathway into a consideration of new technology, and how its role as an enabler and connector might be written into policy level tools as a driver and lever for cultural development in either rural or urban settings or a means to better connect the two

14. The relationship between creativity and innovation is an important (and arguably inseparable one, and should not be lost sight of. Creative endeavour as part of the cultural picture is a driver for innovation as well as often being innovative per se, that might be harnessed through innovation related initiatives such as Smart Specialisation

15. Accessibility will, and ought to be, a central concern for policy actors wishing to ensure that the benefits of culture – as producer and consumer – are made available to everyone in all places

16. That will apply in the contexts of both physical and digital accessibility and across both rural and urban settings in as equitable a way as possible

17. The take up of cultural opportunities will depend to a large degree of the availability of "supporting infrastructure" in the sense of making locations and events physically accessible. That places a particular onus on policy actors in terms of ensuring joined-up collaboration between those working across different policy domains

18. Policy actors might, and are encouraged to, capitalise on natural territorial assets and on connecting territorial assets when looking to influence rural-urban cultural offers

19. Trans-territorial cultural offers will need to be promoted in particular ways and, again, policy actors can be instrumental in that process supporting knowledge exchange, further exploration and research, and practical financial support and incentivisation

20. Policy actors might take special account of the fractured nature of financial support available for culture, (including in a specifically rural-urban context), arguably due at least in part to varying notions of what culture actually "is", funding sources are diverse, and not necessarily as congruent with one another as they might be

21. Whilst, not wishing to lose sight or in any way discourage the overlapping nature of what is deemed to be "cultural" it does make for a complex funding landscape, an issue which might be addressed by improved coordination between funding instruments

22. The achievement of effective rural-urban cultural connections will require particular and new governance arrangements to be established underpinned by appropriate policy interventions

23. In particular, policy actors will want to take account of the need for cooperation across administrative boundaries which do not, anyway, coincide with individual perceptions of place and the culture and cultural identities related to those particular places. That in turns implies a responsibility for policy actors to play a central role in the design and support of networked governance arrangements between existing entities operating with different scales of geographical remits

24. In turn, it also implies a need for the bringing together of broad, participative networks representing multiple interests to reflect the broad and shifting understanding of culture itself, as well as the need to ensure that those involved in decision-making are encouraged and supported to work beyond more immediate interests – be they place, or subject, rooted, whilst at the same time having them fully recognised and respected

Tourism

The ROBUST *Cultural Connections* CoP addressed the subject of cultural connections between rural and urban areas in a number of contexts including tourism. The two are not synonymous but are connected. Much of ROBUST's work took place against the evolving backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, which amongst other many other things led to various forms of fundamental reappraisals of the relative natures, characters, assets and needs of rural and urban places. A number of the recommendations listed might be applied in light of that recognition of the need and opportunity for new forms off relationships between rural and urban places, actors and interests based upon greater mutual understanding and respect and a sense of cross-territorial solidarity.

1. Public infrastructure and services, especially those relating to mobility, the hospitality sector and management of tourist venues/destinations, have a key role to play on facilitate the flow of tourist movement between rural, peri-urban and urban areas to promote local visitor tourism, rural-urban and urban-rural tourism and allow long-distance tourism to valorise all types of territories/access.
2. This support should not have an undue focus upon major urban centres but should look not only beyond those centres but more deliberatively look to support joined-up tourist offers across rural, peri-urban and urban settings
3. Legislation and policy should support both urban and rural public authorities in establishing cross-municipal cooperation relating to their tourist offer in order to increase attractiveness of tourist destinations and share resources
4. In the process of developing or improving cultural/leisure/tourist offers, policy actors might better, and more deliberately and overtly, capitalise on natural /territorial local assets which are complementary to both rural and urban areas
5. Policy actors might build upon existing work and efforts improving the link between urban visitors with rural places *inter alia* by raising awareness about the value of landscapes, open spaces, green areas, places of historic and/or cultural value, local cuisine, traditions and crafts
6. Policy actors might take a lead role in promoting responsible, sustainable and safe behaviour on the part of those utilising rural cultural assets, rooted in an enhanced appreciation of the nature, value and vulnerability of those assets as above
7. Special attention needs to be paid by policy actors to the pressures brought to bear on tourist "hotspots" located in peri-urban and rural areas, the seasonality of those pressures and the negative as well as positive impacts they have on rural and peri-urban residents, businesses, landscapes, local public services and
8. Rural and peri-urban residents should be more closely involved in the governance arrangements relating to decision-making about the development of tourist infrastructure and activities/facilities/attractions with negotiated agreements reached with local communities
9. Public authorities in particular, in their role as place-shapers, might do more to support promotional approaches to trans-territorial touristic offers to not only attract local visitors, but to reach tourists from greater distances who might otherwise not go beyond urban areas.
10. However, and in light of what has already been said, this should be done in a place-sensitive way, taking account of local characteristics, existing infrastructure and services in place to ensure the sustainability of development of tourism in non-urban areas
11. All of the above might be implemented in line with broader policy initiatives based upon an appreciation of the ways in which the cultural and tourism sectors have been particularly affected by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and how the sector (in its broadest sense) might be supported to recover in a resilient and sustainable way

12. Policy actors might, for example take the opportunity to harness Covid-related increased awareness levels in the context of the value of open recreational space, of exercise and of local food supply chains in shaping more sustainable types of tourist activities and offers

Agriculture and Food

Sustainable Food Systems

1. There is a potentially hugely valuable role for policy actors to play, and which to a degree is already being played, in developing the understanding that food systems are not just about agriculture, but are about economy activity and jobs, individual wellbeing, land use, and the quality of environment, ecology and ecosystems

2. This implies a relevance and importance across multiple policy domains which policy actors are encouraged to recognise and respond to accordingly in terms of joined-up working and collaborative approaches across portfolios

3. Clearly an ever-growing number of urban centres are keen to better understand the ways in which they can develop food strategies which are in part at least based upon improving links and connections of different kinds with proximitous peri-urban and rural food production areas

4. This positive trend should be harnessed, supported and developed further in the context of both broad food-related policy frameworks and more localised strategies

5. This greater co-operation between urban, peri-urban and rural areas, actors and interests requires a degree of "unlearning" and of confounding stereotypical understandings of food systems, a role within which policy actors have a key role to play

6. Policy actors are also encouraged to help coordinate actions across a number of policy domain areas which might be better aligned to support rural-urban food linkages, for, by example, facilitating greater and better use of public food procurement systems with the explicit aim to strengthen local food supply chains across territories of different types

7. This approach will need be based on an accurate understanding on the part of policy actors (and, of course, others), of the differing and shifting natures, attributes, priorities, ambitions and constraints of territories of different types (rural, peri-urban, urban etc) – in other words a territorial approach is required

8. Policy actors are encouraged to give greater attention to the particular ways in which rural-urban interactions related to food systems can drive innovation and the development of need business models, as well as take advantage of those innovations and models

9. There is a synergistic dimension at play here where strength can be built upon strength, that requires ongoing support and recognition at all policy levels and across policy domains

10. Particular attention needs to be paid to supporting the role of smaller scale food producers in proximity to urban markets (including those within the urban and peri-urban) in terms of how they might scale-up operations for the benefits of themselves as producers, for purchasers (including public procurement contractors working at scale), and for consumers, as well as for the more general local food system and jobs economy

11. It is clear from the work and findings of ROBUST that challenges in the context of rural-urban sustainable food systems are not limited to production, but are also of critical

concern in aspects such as processing, packaging, logistics and distribution, and access to markets, calling for policy actors to take a rounded approach to reflect this

12. It is noted at the same time, that the focus on the wider food system as opposed to the production dimension alone as immediately above, accords closely with the approach of the EU *Farm to Fork* strategy. Policy actors might take advantage of that alignment when planning national and regional level interventions in rural-urban food systems

13. The work and findings of ROBUST suggest that there are a whole range of new opportunities around food branding schemes and similar, suitable for exploitation in the context of local rural-urban food systems and the provenance and traceability of food

14. In particular, policy actors are pointed towards the opportunities that greater use of local and regional brands within a rural-urban food ecosystem, can bring in terms of bringing together producers, consumers and regulators in new collaborative ways, at the same time confounding any stereotypical assumptions about rural actors being no more than producers and urban actors no more than consumers

15. The connections between local food sourcing and provenance, local food markets and short food chains and public awareness and education are arguably already well-understood, to that existing understanding might now be superimposed a more overt element as to the nature of urban, peri-urban and rural as distinct yet interdependent

16. The Living Labs approach as used by the ROBUST partners directly involved in *the Sustainable Food Systems* Community of Practice, has proved itself a valuable method in amassing detailed local information, in shaping exploration, and comparing findings with other such safe spaces for learning – the future use of Living Labs ought therefore to be further supported and its benefits made better known

17. The ROBUST Living Labs experimentation in the context of sustainable food systems has provided valuable insights into the ways in which local practitioners and scientific research partners can best combine their efforts to produce work and findings in this topic area which policy actors are encouraged to take up and expand upon

18. The work and findings of ROBUST has highlighted the need for appropriate networked governance arrangements in sustainable food systems as much as in any other topic areas. There is huge potential here for policy actors and others to support new and innovative co-creation across the wider food system

19. This support and facilitation for co-creation extends to the end-user/consumer and broad and inclusive governance arrangements can be written into policy frameworks to help develop genuinely sustainable end-to-end (and better still, in many ways, cyclical) food systems

20. Policy actors across a wide range of portfolios will already be familiar with a number of ways in which the Covid-19 outbreak has impacted on food systems and the behaviours of producers, consumers and all others involved. The pandemic has placed great, and timely, focus on local food sustainability and resilience, and policy actors will want not only to track emerging trends and changes in this regard, but to try and shape those in particular ways – inter alia, we would suggest in line with the recommendations within this list

Business and labour markets

For the purposes of the work done by the ROBUST Business Models and Labour Markets CoP and its read-across to work done within other ROBUST communities of practice, there is an intrinsic connection between new and innovative (in particular), business models with a rural-urban linkage dimension on the one hand, and more sustainable use of resources and broad social value creation on the other.

1. Business and job prospects are of relevance and interest across multiple policy domains, the work and findings of ROBUST adds to the body of existing research carried out in this subject area by bringing an explicit rural-urban dimension to this work and as such is commended to policy actors for their consideration

2. In particular it is recommended that ROBUST's work in this area be taken up in the spirit of a corrective to any over-association of business innovation and its related opportunities with urban actors and markets only, and may in that sense be of particular value and use in the context of rural and cross-territorial development policy making

3. This point might be extended to policy considerations in the area of rural innovation, and in particular the ways in which such rural innovation might be enhanced by developing business models explicitly designed to draw upon rural-urban interdependencies

4. It might also be connected to policy actors' deliberations regarding equity of access to the sorts of essential and support services which are necessary to the success of businesses operating with innovative models, and how even that access is across urban, peri-urban and rural areas

5. Digital connectivity is – unsurprisingly – a prominent element within the essential service accessibility referred to immediately above. ROBUST's work here might serve as a timely reminder to policy actors that such connectivity issues are not exclusively a challenge to remote rural areas, but also apply in the case of more settings closer to urban centres looking to capitalise upon that physical proximity

6. Attention is required at the policy level as to just how new business models with a rural-urban dimension are best supported and incentivised and how that support might differ from existing models for support

7. In particular there will be a need for careful consideration of how such rural-urban business models and related job opportunities might be supported within programmes dedicated to support either urban-only or rural-only actors, places, and interests

8. This process would itself be greatly assisted by a better-formed understanding of rural-urban synergies, the benefits they might bring, and the trajectories through which these might be developed to an optimum level – an understanding to which ROBUST's work can hopefully contribute

9. With regard to one particular element of the point immediately preceding, some form of benefit analysis exercise with regard to rural-urban business operations based upon the use of respective territorial assets would be of considerable potential value

10. This subject area of rural-urban business and jobs is cross-cutting (in common with so much else in ROBUST) and as well as looking at business support per se, there are elements here which will require much closer connectivity with land use considerations and, therefore, with spatial planning regimes

11. For example, spatial planning regimes will often impose, remove, or amend restrictions and limitations on land use, a factor of critical importance if the business models are somehow dependant on such land being available locally for particular purposes - recalling for example that a significant proportion of the business models profiles explored within ROBUST were agriculture related

12. Given the fact that many rural-urban business models are based in part, or wholly, upon proximity to urban centres, the mix of open and developed land in areas around urban centres and the role of spatial planning regimes in urbanisation, or indeed counter-urbanisation, initiatives is of importance – and will be an important part of policy actors' focus one would hope

13. In short, genuine and large-scale facilitation of new and emerging rural-urban business models across all sectors is likely to have significant land use implications. It is likely to require spatial planning approaches and practice itself to change if this is to be facilitated – that implies complex challenges for policy actors both within and beyond planning regimes as well as different governance levels all working within existing regulatory frameworks. Given its complexity, its implications should be addressed as a matter of priority

14. The areas pinpointed above as well as others below are all congruent with the focus and content of the *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)* and might usefully be taken up and applied in the context of the implementation phase of the *LTVRA*

15. There is also we suggest a connection to be further developed between many of the new business model profiles considered within ROBUST and ongoing policy work and initiatives around the social economy with its focus on collective interests. Not least with the *European Action Plan for the Social Economy* due for publication one week after the formal end date of the ROBUST project, a connection which policy actors are encouraged to pursue

16. If, as suggested, that *Action Plan* includes provision for the greater integration of support for the social economy within place-based instruments such as the EU cohesion fund, ERDF and ESF+ then policy actors might look at the detail of how such support might be made available in support of business models with an overt rural-urban dimension – potentially extending across programme areas

17. At the level of governance arrangements, there is an urgent need to revaluate the fitness for purpose of the present governance arrangements around setting economic and employment strategies within the confines of either urban or rural administrative units

18. Such governance arrangements require reconfiguration at the level of scale or a new dimension of collaborative practice across smaller administrative units where this is not already the case (ROBUST is aware of work that is already been done at these higher levels or in more joined-up ways and these might themselves serve as exemplar models, or, at least as prototypes)

19. The Covid-19 outbreak has had multiple and shifting impacts with which policy actors at all levels will already be familiar. Aspects such as the migration of people and relocation of businesses, alongside shifts in commuting patterns and greater take-up rates of remote and home working opportunities all have implications for rural-urban business prospects and job opportunities. Further analysis and scenario planning is required in this area

20. That analysis and scenario planning work should be contextualised alongside existing large-scale policy frameworks such as national and regional development strategies with policy actors taking a proactive lead in ensuring consistency and congruence

Physical Infrastructure and Public Service Provision

The work and findings of the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP has primarily addressed a number of different public service delivery areas and approached this in the context of how they are best provided across rural, peri-urban and urban areas and in ways that do not favour one above the other and wherever possible build upon the possibilities presented by rural-urban interdependencies in those areas. The focus in the first sub-section of the report is upon services with infrastructure, and in particular transport infrastructure, addressed in the sub-section which immediately follows.

Service delivery

1. The ways in which public services are delivered is inextricably connected to the geographical setting within which this delivery occurs – this brings a very clear territorial dimension to the subject which needs to form a central part of any policy approach

2. This brings an inevitable place-sensitivity to the way in which public services are designed and delivered – as well as needing to be recognised and respected at the general level, this place sensitivity needs to be better understood when being considered by policy actors with particular regard to administrative areas comprising any mix of urban-peri-urban-rural areas

3. Policy actors, will, at the same time, want to work with a clear appreciation of the different pressures faced in delivering public services in territories of different types, and the different levels of expectation on the part of service-users

4. The provision of public services across urban, peri-urban and rural areas within a given territorial area should be conceived of as a critical dimension of territorial cohesion

5. The provision of services, and its quality, is likely to impact directly on migration flow, housing and property market patterns, travel choices and the use of natural assets – all are critical elements to achieving balanced territorial development and should be carefully weighed in the balance by policy actors at national and sub-national levels

6. The Living Labs approach as utilised by ROBUST has shown the value of working in a joined-up local setting to generate ideas, findings, and evidence that can be drawn upon in considering a wide range of issues in delivering public services

7. The value of this work might be built upon by quickly multiplying the scale of work that has been done within the ROBUST project by supporting further Living Labs across Europe to experiment further in areas such as health and care, leisure and recreation, mobility, education, housing, and participation in democratic processes

8. Fairness and equity (if not equality) in the accessibility of public services should be a central policy concern and essentially be regarded as a cross-cutting dimension of policy shaping and subsequent delivery

9. The most obvious context in which most work in this area has been delivered – and ROBUST is no exception, and there is already a large body of work upon which policy actors might also rely

– has been the greater comparative geographic distances (and therefore time) required to access physically delivered public services in rural as opposed to urban areas, this should provide further reason for accessibility to services to be regarded as an issue with a clear territorial dimension

10. A key point for policy actors to consider here is that many of the public services being described are intended to be universal and there is legal obligation to deliver same, with the result that policy actors will be looking at many of these issues in the context of there being a legal obligation to deliver them

11. There is a clear linkage between access to universal/general services and individual wellbeing. Policy actors will rightly look to the quality of access to, and delivery of, such services as key quality of life (QoL) indicators

12. There is scope to undertake further important work looking at relative QoL indicators in different territorial setting so as to better inform future policy as the best measure to use and exactly how they might be applied in a place-sensitive way

13. ROBUST has drawn attention to a number of possible models around the ways in which services are delivered in a mixed public-private markets and have provided policy actors with examples of how this might be structured in a range of European rural-urban settings, this might be made use of in informing ongoing policy debate about market shaping

14. In the same context of market shaping, continuing attention needs to be paid to the ways in which public sector bodies might look to support or subsidise services which would otherwise not be commercially viable but are nevertheless best delivered by the for-profit sector

15. It should also be borne in mind that service delivery can effectively be delivered vis contract by third-sector operator on a not-for-profit basis, policy actors might do more to support mechanisms and support then as an important dimension of community resilience and cohesion

16. Rural-urban proximity brings opportunities for a mix of physical and digital service delivery, the particular opportunities that apply are a subject for further research and consideration

17. The work done by the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP on the subject of food provides a valuable and useable example to policy actors of how rural-urban settings can be turned to advantage in the development of local food chains

18. Local food systems are offered as an example of subject areas in which rural service hubs might play a valuable role in ensuring the sort of territorial cohesion referred to above – there is scope for considerable further experimentation looking at how service hubs in non-urban areas can capitalise on rural-urban synergies

19. There needs to be a better developed understanding of the ways in which public sector bodies can better support initiatives related to local food systems, which whilst not being a legal duty might make a valuable contribution to policy goals in areas such as health and in individual wellbeing

20. The impact of covid-19 and the unique pressures which it has placed on the delivery of general services is well-known and has already been the subject of much analysis and speculation as to future trends. Policy actors will want to be sure to equip themselves with a clear picture of any territorial unevenness in service provision and quality as part of recovery processes

Mobility infrastructure

1. The work done by the *Public Infrastructure and Social Services* CoP has helped in highlighting the importance of transport infrastructure and services, both as a service in its own right and as enabler in providing other services effectively – this should serve as a reminder to policy actors and practitioners of the interdependencies between service areas

2. Transport systems and services will impact directly on service access issues and at the disproportionate levels of challenges relating to physical access faced in less-connected parts of a territory

3. That same recognition of service interdependencies therefore needs to be contextualised in terms of territorial settings – more valuable work might be done in this regard

4. The nature of commuting needs to be better understood, not solely as an urban service to rural areas, residents and business, but as a linkage mechanism of mutual benefit to both the rural and the urban

5. The, at least temporary, effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on commuting volumes has been extremely well-documented. Given the critical role of commuting in ensuring rural - peri-urban – urban connectivity future developments will need to be monitored extremely closely

6. Policy actors might look to manage future commuter transport provision as a means by which to incentivise or disincentivise other mobility behaviours – e.g., modal shifts to active mobility, or to private transport use

7. They might also look to manage future commuter transport provision as a means by which to incentivise or disincentivise other behaviours beyond mobility, e.g., the take up of opportunity for remote or home working – potentially, making greater use of digital technology to support such shifts in working styles

8. In each of the points related to commuting above, policy actors might also consider the impacts on the points from which commuting begins and ends if volumes are to remain markedly different to pre-pandemic levels

9. The critical importance of first and last mile transport provision needs to be better recognised and understood

10. In particular, the work and findings of ROBUST might serve as a timely reminder of the critical importance of providing genuine end-to-end mobility options if travelling behaviours (particularly in the context of shifts from private to public transport) are to change

11. In similar vein, the importance and potential of on-demand mobility services needs further investigation as part of place-sensitive strategies to bring about both changes in mobility patterns/behaviours and in overcoming barriers to maximising the value of rural-urban linkages

12. If these on-demand services are to be developed as part of a broader integrated Mobility as a Service (MaaS) offer, then further work will need to be done into what makes such MaaS offers acceptable or desirable to individual service users

13. Non-urban MaaS requires further investigation and testing in both peri-urban and rural settings

14. Mobility as a rural-urban linkage raises particular issues re interoperability and shared-ticketing schemes across administrative borders which will potentially require policy interventions at a supra-local level

15. Mobility nodes – and in particular what is frequently described as urban nodes – need to be paid special attention by policy actors.

Wellbeing

Given the strong emphasis and focus in ROBUST's work upon the need to shape our thinking on rural-urban linkages in a contextualisation of wellbeing, this report also offers a series of recommendations with regard to the policy dimensions of supporting a wellbeing-centred approach to the ways in which rural-urban linkages might be strengthened and synergised, with a clear eye on individual wellbeing and an economy model designed to go beyond the purely financial and to support the wellbeing of all people in all places. For the purposes of this argument, "people" might be taken to mean individuals, communities, business and human activity in general.

1. A wellbeing model such as that developed and espoused by ROBUST, is rooted in notions of rural-urban connectivity which enhances human lives in territories of different types and at levels beyond the purely economic/financial. Policy actors are encouraged to embrace that same positive approach

2. According, as it does, with significant amounts of policy-related work over a considerable amount of time in looking to devise frameworks in which individual wellbeing and quality of life "going beyond GDP" alone is made central, we suggest that ROBUST's work and findings bring valuable and additional evidence to this ongoing debate, of which we would encourage policy actors to make use

3. We suggest that that value is all the greater - and novel - in having been arrived at from an overtly territorial starting point, (the rural-urban) and that, as such, it brings added value to policy tenets at EU, national and subnational levels about making people's personal wellbeing central to the rationale for interventions, at the same time ensuring that no-one (and no place) is excluded from that consideration

4. The decoupling of development and growth which is often posited as a central tenet of wellbeing (economy) models, is mirrored in a number of ROBUST's own findings in terms of what might be important in terms of rural-urban labour markets and the aims and aspirations of new and innovative business models designed to support rural-linkages and build on rural-urban interdependencies, a further point to which we would draw policy actors' attention

5. There is congruence we suggest between the wellbeing dimensions highlighted within ROBUST's work and the *European Pillar of Social Rights* amongst the 20 principles of which sit considerations of access to essential services, of work-life balance and of working conditions for platform workers for example

6. We would also draw particular attention at the EU and Individual EU member state level, to the ongoing work of the EU Council of Ministers (and hence national level), work on the " economy of wellbeing" which closely aligns with much of ROBUST's own focus and findings on the ways in which (improved) wellbeing can be used as the central objective/outcome around which economic development models might be built

7. As the Council of Ministers' initiative reminds us, GDP does not measure the wellbeing of people, it begs the question (not a new question) as to what measures are in fact best suited to achieve that. That is an ongoing debate a long way beyond the remit and ambit of ROBUST, but the work done within the project does point up the need to work in a place-sensitive

dimension with ROBUST's work and approach hopefully making a case for rural-urban to be a distinct element therein

8. The same Council of Ministers' initiative calls for action to be taken at EU and national levels to "assess the impact on wellbeing of policy measures in all fields". Clearly a huge undertaking, this will need to be approached in a highly systemised way. ROBUST's work can serve here as an up-to-date indication of how it may apply and be conceptualised in at least some policy areas

9. Many aspects of ROBUST's work have brought into focus the important role of spatial planning in bringing about positive wellbeing outcomes, this EU member state level intervention, - coming as it does from the Council of Ministers level – is valuable in reminding us of the critical importance of the national level in driving forward positive change in areas where the EU itself has no direct legal competence

10. The same consideration as immediately above, should trigger the Territorial Agenda 2030 being overtly brought into play as a framework within which future work in this regard might be orientated

11. If, as the Council of Ministers proposes, one potential way forward is to address inequalities in wellbeing outcomes, then one lesson emerging from ROBUST is to ensure that inequalities/differences are analysed across territories of different types as well as across categorisations such as age, gender and ethnicity

12. As well as looking at inequalities, the approach of ROBUST implies the positive value of looking to cross-territory collaboration and synergy building as a means to address any such inequalities and reduce inequalities – allowing, perhaps for an approach that encompasses not only inequalities but also how they might be addressed

13. In its own recent work on this subject, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has made the same connection as ourselves between wellbeing and the territorial dimension when it calls upon the EU to establish the "foundations for a sustainable and inclusive wellbeing economy that works for everyone" as part of its Opinion on "*Towards a holistic strategy on sustainable rural/urban development*", (October 2021)

14. The same opinion, it might be noted, also calls for the work on ROBUST to be further developed in the future – signposting at least one way in which recent work might be used to inform a highly topical subject area

15. It should also be noted that that work itself draws upon the January 2021 EESC opinion The *sustainable economy we need*", within which it addressed the same need to balance economic prosperity concerns with considerations about ecological constraints as ROBUST addressed in the more immediate context of rural-urban where this interface and conflict is often at its most apparent

16. In subsequent work on preparing an opinion on "Beyond GDP measures for a successful recovery and a sustainable and resilient EU economy" (ongoing), the EESC has again emphasised the need to move beyond looking only at growth indicators but to layer in other factors of equal importance in just the way that ROBUST has done in arriving at its wellbeing/foundation economy model within Work Package 3.

Recommendations on EU policy instruments

Territorial Agenda 2030

The Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030) was published in December 2020 as a successor document to the previous Territorial Agenda published in 2011. Both emanate from the EU Council of Ministers and more specifically from work undertaken at the behest of national level ministers with responsibility for spatial planning or similar portfolios. The connection between the Territorial Agendas and spatial planning is strong and deliberate, and they are in turn closely related to the EU territorial cohesion policy area, albeit that it is also deliberately cross-cutting.

The TA2030 is also addressed in some detail within the ROBUST Work Package 6 *"Policy briefing on current prospects, challenges, and obstacles regarding place-based synergy governance"* (Deliverable D6.2), and an in-depth analysis of its implications on the context of each of ROBUST's five Community of Practice areas is included in the set of "*Thematic Topic Papers (TTPs) on Rural-Urban Cooperation….*" (Deliverable D6.1).

To minimise duplication, the recommendations listed below have deliberately been kept brief:

1. There is considerable shared focus and congruence between ROBUST's work and findings and the content of the TA2030
2. The TA2030's emphasis on balanced territorial development closely reflects ROBUST's own focus on rural-urban interdependencies and synergies – those correlations should be built upon post-ROBUST
3. Its focus on functionality, the importance of regional and local level development and in addressing inequalities also directly mirror much that has emerged from ROBUST and again could profitably be revisited post ROBUST completion
4. Six TA2030 pilot actions are already underway and could draw directly upon ROBUST's work as they are further developed - particularly with regard to governance arrangements, another area of shared focus and considerable detailed work on the part of ROBUST
5. Also in the context of governance arrangements, the importance of "continuous capacity building" at all levels" is emphasised (Art 22), a point which could usefully be extended - not only at all levels, but across all actors from places of different types in line with ROBUST's own conclusions regarding network governance arrangements
6. And in very similar vein we read too (art 22 again) of the need for "….cooperation across sector policies as well as levels of government and governance, while also engaging local communities." This accords well, especially with ROBUST's Work Package 4 conclusion sin particular, but again, it is not only cooperation across policy sectors that is needed but also across territories of different types
7. The point which the TA2030 makes with regard to the importance of functional areas which "break with existing administrative delineations" (Art 49) is especially valuable in establishing detailed common ground - it might be added that functionality is very often specifically linked to a particular function making it difficult to arrive at a meaningful functional area in relation to any one geographic location
8. The digital and physical connectivity of places is another obvious area of shared interest - ROBUST's work has placed the TA2030's rather more general approach and coverage in a specific rural-urban context

9. We note (Art 48) the ministers' commitment: ""We will take action to encourage decision makers at all governance levels to unleash the unique potential of territories with specific geographies". In that case, rural-urban interfaces should themselves be regarded as one of these specific geographies and it would be useful to have more detail on what form that action is likely to take

10. On the accompanying TA2030 website we read that "Different geographical approaches, for example via functional urban areas, cross-border areas, urban-rural linkages etc., can develop innovative solutions to common challenges and unlock new potentials". ROBUST is in total agreement but the point would be made stronger and more convincing if it were to be repeated to multiple audiences with worked examples included – some of which at least might be directly drawn from the work and findings of ROBUST.

Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

The Rural Pact

We are told that the Rural Pact is intended to provide a common framework and is to be developed with the involvement of "all levels of governance and stakeholders". Much of the detail remains unclear, perfectly reasonably as this is very much an evolving piece of work. Based on the work and findings of ROBUST and what we understand to be envisaged, we would make the following observations and recommendations:

1. If that common framework approach is indeed the one adopted, it will need to be broad enough to allow for a range of different pacts, of different types, to be applied in different places - presumably this is already the intention

2. That then allows for a series of more localised pacts to be established shaped within an agreed framework, which will look to give both shape and flexibility

3. If that is indeed the intended model, then the European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP), (also referred to at Section 5.1 of the ROBUST "*policy briefing on current prospects, challenges, and obstacles regarding place-based synergy governance*" [Deliverable 6.2]) might serves as a working example of such a guiding framework

4. Given the complexity and number of stakeholders involved in any one single pact and what one might anticipate to be the resulting difficulty of managing them at a larger scale, they are presumably intended to operate at a more local level - that approach would reflect lessons learned within ROBUST where the depth, detail, and close working relationships required, all have serious time implications

5. This is probably to sound a note of realism and caution, and to suggest that establishing pacts based on trust and shared knowledge is a process that will only evolve slowly if ROBUST's own experiences of rural-urban governance arrangements are a guide

6. Higher-level pact arrangements would anyway risk running counter to the subsidiarity principle, and indeed to the principles of networked governance arrangements experimented with by ROBUST in a rural-urban context

7. It is as yet undetermined who these pacts are intended to be between as we understand the situation – presumably between rural actors in given rural areas in at least some instances, who might then agree between themselves how best to promote and protect the interests, and realise the potential, of a given rural area. In that case there are corollaries with the ways of

working of Living Labs as utilised in ROBUST if there is an overt dimension of bringing these actors together in some sort of spirit of experimentation

8. There might also be scope to develop pacts between sets of the sorts of localised arrangements and agreements described immediately above. If that approach is to be supported within the framework it may align well with some of ROBUST's experiences in terms of bringing together previously unconnected actors into new networked groupings

9. The model that would most closely align with ROBUST's own work and findings though would be if pacts were to be developed between rural actors. and non-rural actors and interests. Under that scenario many of ROBUST's findings are directly applicable, particularly in terms of representativeness, equality of voice, ownership and leadership etc

10. If that route is to be pursued, ROBUST's work would lend itself well to the construction of some sort of "ideal type" model rooted in directly relevant and recent experience that might then be further tested with others

11. A model of pacts between rural and non-rural actors and interests would have the advantage of bringing in thinking about linkages across different types of territory at a very early stage of the process in line with many other elements of the LTVRA

12. Work in developing pacts between rural and non-rural actors and interests might also usefully be developed in tandem with work being done in other policy domains looking to better connect urban and rural – examples here being the extension of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) beyond urban areas alone and the establishment of Integrated Territorial Initiatives under the 2021-27 cohesion policy's Priority Objective 5 (see also policy recommendations below with regard to ERDF/CF and ESF+ in this last regard)

13. The rural – non-rural pacts would presumably also learn from the French contrats de réciprocité model, and perhaps also share the characteristic of being strongly public authority led. ROBUST's work and findings would suggest the benefits of a broader approach, but again tempered with caution as to the amount of time and organisation required

14. Particular attention will need to be paid as to who is driving the process of arriving at any one pact – to what degree is it bottom up or top-down? Is there scope for example for developing a "grassroots" pact, instigated by citizens as opposed to by formal public institutions? Again, ROBUST would point to some of its own lessons learned in this regard

15. There has been reference in the recent past to the involvement of both the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions in shaping the Rural Pact – it would be good to understand their intended role better and it may be that they too might also draw directly upon ROBUST's work and findings.

Rural Revitalisation

Clearly, the LTVRA looks to revitalise rural areas so that they become stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous. That revitalisation will be of benefit not only to rural actors and interests but to non-rural actors and interests as well.

Policy recommendations:

1. Rural revitalisation will not be achieved in a rural vacuum, it is be brought about by revitalising rural areas as part of a broader territorial mosaic across Europe
2. Under this model the distinct assets, character and contribution of rural areas will come to be fully recognised by both rural and non-rural actors and interests
3. ROBUST's work and findings have served to underline the importance of rural-urban linkages based upon inter-dependency and the scope to increase synergies between the two

4. Those rural-urban linkages and interdependencies are themselves part of the rural character, rooted firmly in the realisation that linkages should be designed and supported so as to bring about greater mutual benefit

5. Rural-urban linkages will be an essential part of transitioning towards a model of wellbeing where all people and places will benefit from Europe's strengths and assets in a fair way that leaves no-one and no place behind. That will need to be well understood and worked towards by policy actors at all levels, not least by the Rural Revitalisation Platform itself

6. ROBUST has demonstrated the value of, amongst other things, delivering essential services in new ways, of developing new business models themselves built on rural-linkages, on rural-urban cooperation to maximise the benefits of ecosystem services and of developing locally sustainable food systems across rural-urban lines, all have a direct contribution to make to rural revitalisation

7. Integrated territorial strategies are a required element of arriving at rural revitalisation, these strategies will need to be integrated not only across sectors but across territories of different types, rural, peri-urban, and urban

8. ROBUST's experiences show that rural revitalisation is to be achieved by giving rural actors genuine ownership over governance arrangements and an equal voice in making decisions about matters that impact on proximitous rural and urban areas

9. The importance of developing joined-up financial support mechanisms using European Structural and Investment Funds is addressed in greater detail in the ERDF/CF and ESF+ sections below, in particular by using the new PO5 flexibilities, this will be important in achieving rural revitalisation and will be all the more effective if done with a clear focus on rural-urban linkages

10. There might also be particular scope to take work on revitalisation forward on a transnational knowledge-exchange level, in the same way as ROBUST has done, using the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) Interreg instrument, and Interreg Europe in particular with scope to develop joint pilot actions on regional and local policy tools.

Rural Innovation

1. ROBUST's work and findings have highlighted the importance of developing innovation in a rural-urban context

2. Rural innovation is in reality not a rural-only concern, successful innovation will, in various ways, be dependent upon cooperation between rural and urban actors and interests

3. Innovation is over-associated with the urban, with cities posited as "cradles of innovation" and similar, that is to ignore and underplay the large amount of innovation taking place in rural and peri-urban areas

4. Rural innovation is about much more than agricultural innovation alone and will relate to all aspects of rural wellbeing and territorial development

5. Innovation is not only about technical innovation but also about innovative ways of working, including joint working between rural and urban actors and interests

6. Rural interests should be embedded across all forms of innovation and be reflected in the ways that innovations in areas of universal relevance and value are developed and rolled out

7. Support for rural innovation should come from a large number of sources and not be restricted to instruments with a specific rural focus

8. Particular attention should be paid to the ways in which innovation can itself bring about rural-urban synergies

9. At the same time the building of trajectories towards rural-urban synergy can be the catalyst for innovation

10. The *European Startup Village Forum* gives the opportunity to reset the button in terms of all of the above

Land use planning/zonings

1. The focus of a proposed study on farming land use and land use planning more generally as set out in the annex of the *communication* is welcome
2. Farming land use occurs not only in rural areas, but in peri-urban ones and even urban ones
3. Rural-urban land will typically be more fragmented than in remoter rural areas but might be a useful element within this proposed work, with land fragmentation and access issues themselves a determinant of land use and land use planning decisions
4. ROBUST's work and findings have in various ways highlighted the importance of spatial planning processes in terms of managing development in general and specific terms
5. Spatial planning has the scope to be experimental and innovative in managing open space as well as built space as evidenced within ROBUST's work
6. The role of spatial planning in contributing to landscape-scale land management has also been highlighted within ROBUST
7. Multi-functional land use is highly characteristic of rural areas more proximitous to urban centres, and can be a key dimension in optimising rural-urban ecosystem services alongside growing food for local markets etc., that might be included within the scope of any study.

Rural mobility

1. Rural mobility forms one element of a larger trans-territorial mobility system operating across rural, peri-urban and urban areas
2. The success, or otherwise, of rural mobility systems and services will, to a large degree, be dependent upon connectivity with non-rural areas
3. The inherent connectedness of mobility in rural and non-rural areas has implications for how decision-making processes regarding mobility are organised at local, regional, national, and transnational levels
4. There are particular, and obvious, challenges around rural mobility related to remoteness and distance, non-proximity to essential - and other public - services and critical mass of passenger and goods volumes
5. These challenges will themselves impact upon and be impacted upon by the ways in which other public services are delivered, and made accessible, in rural areas
6. Rural mobility systems and services are links in a larger chain with a particular need to pay attention to first and last mile provision as evidenced in much of ROBUST's work
7. There are both particular challenges and particular opportunities related to making rural mobility and services economically and environmentally viable
8. The whole subject of rural mobility is closely related to that of individual wellbeing, not only in terms of access to essential services but also in the context of recreation and quality of life more generally, factors which in turn directly connect to the "liveability" and attractiveness of rural areas
9. Innovative solutions to rural mobility challenges will require sustained support and ought to be developed as an integral part of multi-dimension place-shaping initiatives
10. The growing trend of multi-locality living, in part connected to, or at least associated with, the Covid-19 outbreak, will impact on future needs as regards rural mobility systems and services.

Urban mobility

1. Urban mobility must be understood as an integral part of a broader trans-territorial mobility system with as optimal connectivity between different sorts of territories as can be achieved
2. It follows that it cannot treated as a distinct system lacking regard to how it connects to other parts of that same mobility system in non-urban areas
3. Mobility policy and planning therefore needs to operate at the broader territorial level
4. A key success factor in achieving optimal urban mobility is its connectivity to non-urban systems and services
5. In that sense, it follows that urban mobility is not the exclusive interest of urban actors
6. Nor should it be assumed that urban mobility systems and services made use of by rural actors are designed only in the interests of rural residents and businesses - urban mobility service operators will often also depend on a non-urban customer base for their financial viability in a complex mixed market
7. The work and findings of ROBUST has served to underline the importance of a joined-up approach to mobility planning across rural, peri-urban and urban areas
8. All the above apply in the contexts of both the transportation of people and of goods
9. The quality and potential of rural-urban linkages is inextricably linked with the quality of mobility systems operating both within and across urban, rural and peri-urban areas
10. The notion of urban is itself fluid and evolving and the urban nature or other of any one place is in part determined by mobility systems themselves.

Statistical data

1. ROBUST has highlighted the limitations of any simplistic rural-urban binary model used as the basis for data collection and analysis
2. Rural and urban are both mutable concepts with meanings which evolve and points of differentiation which are fuzzy and shifting
3. Rural areas and urban areas are both broad headings used to encompass a large number of different and distinct place-types whilst at the same time rendering those differences and distinctions less visible
4. The use of a growing number of different increasingly stratified typologies is in large part an attempt to better capture and understand those difference and distinctions
5. Greater stratification is at the same time necessary to more meaningfully capture reality in a more place-sensitive way
6. Places are static, whilst human activity isn't, capturing the functional nature of places both rural and urban is a challenge that must be successfully overcome, but is not necessarily looked at most helpfully through the lens of administrative units
7. Rural-urban is itself, in ROBUST and elsewhere, looked at in terms of functions and through different thematic domains, which will not necessarily align meaningfully with lines on a map and will not align in the same ways with lines on a map depending on the function under consideration .....
8. .... For example, spatial connections between rural and urban will look very different in terms of ecosystems as opposed to cultural connections – all statistical data will therefore need careful and cautious contextualisation.

Functional rural areas

1. Functional areas is a term and a concept which tends to be used to describe areas of mixed territorial types which are linked for the purposes of one or more function
2. In that sense the notion has a relevance and potential congruence with ROBUST as a means to better explain how (perhaps more to the point here, "where"), rural-urban linkages exist
3. Functional areas and functional urban areas (FUAs) seem to have taken on a degree of synonymity and seem also to very much be arrived at from a starting point of looking at how non-urban areas somehow provide functionality to an urban one
4. In that sense, functional urban area might be taken as a misnomer insofar as it consciously attempts to capture something that is not solely about the urban
5. The Territorial Agenda 2030 places great emphasis on functional regions but in citing *the Leipzig Charter 2.0* of 2020, seems in similar vein to consider functional regions as being primarily about "cities, urban areas, their functional regions….", as if one is somehow the property of the other
6. Any attempt to bring meaning to functional rural areas would presumably face a similar linguistic challenge
7. In greater congruence with ROBUST's explorations however, the Territorial Agenda 2030 also helpfully reflects on the scope to use functional regions as a way to shape development perspectives "for all places taking into account the need to promote urban-rural linkages"
8. That same overt consideration of functional regions and the urban-rural linkage dimension thereof, would presumably therefore also apply to any conceptualisation of rural functional areas
9. ROBUST's work and findings indicate however, that considerations of functionality are closely linked to specific functions (food, culture, labour markets, ecosystems etc) and that it is therefore extremely difficult to determine what a functional region/area might look like other than a series of single specific functional contexts
10. That in turn suggests that a single definition may remain elusive, or may come with sufficient caveats to make its value limited.

Rural Proofing

1. Rural proofing as a means to capture and assess the impacts of what is done in one place upon another, dates back at least as far as the original Cork Declaration of 1996
2. There is a considerable body of work on rural proofing which can be drawn upon now that it has come more firmly back into view in the context of the LTVRA
3. Rural proofing mechanisms bring the opportunity to consider in a detached way what the effects of doing things in one place (or type of place) are likely to be upon other places/types of places, and using that assessment to decide whether and how to proceed further in any one given direction
4. There is a congruence here with work on rural-urban linkages and interdependencies, given the inherent dimension of thinking about territories of two different types simultaneously
5. In that sense much of the work done by ROBUST can be conceived of as having proofing elements written into its design and practice, where consideration is given to consequences and impacts in different settings
6. That in itself points up the multi-directional dimension of proofing mechanisms and the desirability of an approach that takes account of consequences and impacts in the round

7. There is a corollary in calling for greater use of rural proofing with the approach taken by the Urban Agenda for the EU when it looks to ensure that all EU policy making should take into account the impacts that might be felt in urban areas and/or by urban actors as a consequence of its implementation

8. New rural proofing mechanisms offer more however than just the chance to undertake an equalisation exercise, they can be formulated as an element within a fuller 360 degree impact assessment of the likely and potential impacts of any legislative or policy proposal

9. Its application might be extended beyond initiatives which explicitly set out to be of rural benefit as suggested within the communication annex text and extend to all proposed interventions whether their main focus be rural benefit or not – this would be one means by which to bring more rural-urban and urban focused proposals into scope, ROBUST's work suggests that cross-currents across rural-urban spaces are greater than might initially be supposed

10. This proofing might also be adopted further downstream in the context of investments made within funding instruments, where consideration might be given to potential impacts at the level of actions within programmes.

Farm to Fork

In May 2020, the European Commission (EC) published the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy Communication - "for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system" - as the full title has it, complete with annex containing a draft action plan comprising 27 measures. As well as the 23 page Communication + Strategy document, the EC published at the same time a "Factsheet" on F2F (with the subtitle "Our food, our health, our planet, our future", and an "accompanying document" entitled "Analysis of links between CAP Reform and Green Deal".

With regards to F2F the following policy recommendations are offered:

1. F2F's focus on whole food systems as opposed to food production alone is very welcome, it reflects ROBUST's own approach in looking at sustainable food systems in the round

2. Sustainable food systems work across territories of different types and in ways much more complex than the oversimplistic model of rural food production leading to urban consumption

3. The system-wide approach is helpful in enabling one to isolate and consider different elements in the system - ROBUST has highlighted the high proportion of sustainable food systems related activity that takes place in setting where the rural and urban are proximitous - that point might usefully be brought out more strongly as F2F implementation is rolled out

4. The most obvious rural-urban context with regard to sustainable food is in the context of developing local - hence short - food chains, and ROBUST has indicated a number of ways in which better organised linkages can ameliorate this process in a planned way

5. It is at the same time important to recall that ROBUST's work suggests that this is unlikely to happen "naturally", and is likely to require a deliberate initiative-taking, not necessarily on the part of public authorities, but mainly so in practice

6. ROBUST has highlighted, for example, the scope for urban and rural actors to come together to establish affordable public selling spaces and to develop closer cooperation based on better knowledge and mutual understanding - models which can be drawn from and developed

7. There is also an important role in a rural-urban context for bringing together sustainable food operators and supporting them to cooperate in the context of local (rural-urban proximitous) food supply chains

8. Urban food policies were explored within ROBUST as a means by which local sustainable food systems might be supported within territorially specific settings, capitalising on place-related regional branding and provenance schemes and similar – there is huge scope to adopt and further develop such schemes in line with F2F objectives

9. ROBUST has highlighted the importance of the use of public procurement regimes in helping sustainable food supply become financially viable, with all that that implies for local economies, whilst at the same time supplying high-quality, traceable food into the public marketplace

10. In their role as large-scale purchasers/customers, public bodies making food purchases for schools, hospitals and other public institutions can act as anchor institutes in developing changing food-related markets and behaviours

11. The role of the consumer as emphasised within both F2F and ROBUST has demonstrated a number of ways in which direct links between consumer and supplier can be developed in a rural-urban context.

Biodiversity 2030

In May 2020, the European Commission (EC) published the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 with the strapline "Bringing nature back into our lives", and complete with annex containing a draft action plan comprising almost 40 specific actions. As well as the 27 page Strategy + annex document, the EC published at the same time a "Factsheet" on the EU Biodiversity Strategy (with the same "Bringing nature back into our lives" title), a four-page Questions and Answers document and a second factsheet specifically addressing "The business case for biodiversity".

With regards to Biodiversity 2030 Strategy the following policy recommendations are offered:

1. As a core element of the European Green Deal, the Biodiversity 2030 strategy sets out key ambitions and targets which need to be understood to apply to biodiversity issues across all territories

2. This relevance to territories of all types needs to be emphasised, as well as the critical importance of cooperation across territories of different types

3. As is often pointed out, biodiversity is no respecter of administrative borders, that has a particular salience in the context of rural-urban linkages, themselves boundary-crossing by definition

4. Protecting nature and reversing biodiversity loss has a particular pertinence in the rural-urban context as the work and findings of ROBUST demonstrate

5. The different and complementary contributions of rural, peri-urban and urban actors and places in achieving the objectives of the strategy need to be better understood and better reflected in public communications

6. Farmers and farming have a crucial role to play in achieving the strategy's objective, that applies to peri-urban farmers and farming as well as to rural operations, but it needs to be recognised and communicated that the scale and exact type of contribution is different

7. There are particular challenges, but also particular opportunities, relating to managing, repairing, and enhancing biodiversity in rural-urban proximitous areas, this needs to be allowed for in measures to support the strategy's implementation

8. The Covid-19 outbreak has shifted public perceptions in terms of open space, access to habitats and public land and to land and landscape management, this applies particularly strongly in rural spaces close to urban habitations. This has implications for the already complex way in which space and biodiversity is managed between rural and urban actors – this needs to be

incorporated into detailed thinking about how different territories are best able to contribute to the strategy's objectives and how nature restoration targets are arrived at

9. It needs to be recognised that there are particularly complex balances to be achieved in the rural-urban context in terms of combating unsustainable actions and behaviours in places where pressures on land and natural spaces are especially acute and where fragility prevails

10. The ways in which ecosystem services are optimised, managed, and paid for, is place-sensitive as ROBUST's work has demonstrated – these place-sensitivities result in a need for different support mechanisms and governance arrangements

11. The considerations within the Biodiversity 2030 Strategy are closely linked to other dimensions of the European Green Deal including for example provisions relating to land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) included as part of the Fit for 55 package. That should serve as a reminder to address biodiversity as an element within land use planning more broadly

12. This is a connection that ROBUST has made in its own work on ecosystem services giving consideration to the role of land use (spatial) planning, this should also be a prominent and clearly communicated dimension in approaching the strategy's implementation.

Common Agricultural Policy (and CAP Strategic Plans)

Given that national level Rural Development Programmes part-funded through EAFRD sit within the second pillar of the CAP and direct payments are made through the EAGF under pillar one, there is a clear financial dimension at play here, yet CAP remains more than solely a payment scheme in the version agreed in June 2021. The national level comes all the more to prominence in plans for the reformed CAP post 2020 with the introduction of national level CAP Strategic Plans for the first time and greater scope to shape agricultural and rural development activities at a more local level

We make the following recommendations:

1. Agriculture and rural are not synonymous and should not be over-associated, ROBUST has explored much rural activity that is not related to food systems, and some of the food production explored within the project has taken place in areas more readily thought of as peri-urban as opposed to rural

2. Food systems nevertheless continue to constitute a major element within rural economies, within rural land use and rural life in general, it is also a key factor in the realm of rural-urban linkages

3. Achieving vibrant rural areas is one of the nine objectives of the CAP post-2020, a reminder that this is not all about agriculture

4. The orientation within that objective is mainly around jobs and growth, ROBUST's work and findings would lead us towards a more general interpretation of vibrancy centred around wellbeing

5. The reformed CAP is a key means of delivery of both the Farm2Fork and Biodiversity 2030 policy strategies and therefore more directly instrumental in delivering policy targets which are not of its own making, that new dimension needs to be recognised

6. Biodiversity is also the focus of another of the nine post 2020 CAP objectives to "contribute to the protection of biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services and preserve habitats and landscapes". That, we suggest can only be achieved through capitalising upon rural-urban linkages

7. The bringing together of agriculture and rural development within the CAP will inevitably cause some coalescence between the two, but rural development needs support from beyond what is in many ways a sectoral instrument

8. CAP should not be seen as the sole support mechanism for rural development, therefore. There are multiple reasons for this but the one most pertinent to ROBUST's work is that support for rural-urban linkages will then simply fall out of geographic scope in some instances and be rendered ineligible for support

9. Territorially circumscribed programmes will always remain potentially problematic when looking to support work across different types of territory - that calls for a more mature and responsive funding ecosystem

10. CAP Strategic Plans offer the opportunity for more place-sensitive and place-specific plans than previously, the genuine involvement of multiple stakeholders will be critical in their development if that place dimension is to be fully realised

11. Strategic Plans offer the opportunity for an overt consideration of the role of rural-urban linkages within any one national or sub-national setting in contributing to the achievement of the nine post-2020 CAP objectives and to the relevant quantitative targets as set out in the F2F and Biodiversity 2030 strategies

12. The European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) could be used as a framework to shape the governance arrangements relating to CAP Strategic Plans helping to ensure local and regional involvement across a range of stakeholders in line with ROBUST's own conclusions as regards network governance arrangements.

Circular Economy Action Plan

1. The development of the circular economy should be place-based. By that we mean that it should build on local potential, needs, and circumstances that exist in a specific territory, allowing for the best use of locally available resources

2. All CE initiatives need to reflect the specific territory in which activity occurs. CE, like any other type of economic activity – occurs in a specific geographic setting with its own particular strengths and weaknesses, facing different challenges and threats and offering varied opportunities and potential. It is, in practice, closely linked to, inter alia, the nature and density of overall supra-local economic production and consumption systems, specific settlement structures and transport infrastructure systems and arrangements

3. Local and regional circular economy initiatives should connect the places of origin of resources, of the manufacturing of products, and of their consumption and eventual disposal. That implies – in many cases – that effective measures require the cooperation of rural, peri-urban and urban areas and appropriate governance arrangements between them

4. In consequence, CE policy-making should also be territorially-sensitive. Adjusting the priorities and targets to local and regional characteristics will hugely increase the chances of successful policy implementation

5. EU policy papers on CE, including the 2020 *Circular Economy Action Plan* itself would benefit from making it clear that CE applies to all places as opposed to focusing overly on urban areas - CE precepts, potential, and actual- value, and benefits are universal and therefore relevant to all places

6. Policy-making in the area of CE should be coherent with other sectoral and territorial policies. In particular, it should be developed to take account of existing and emerging policies relating to the protection of biodiversity, ecosystems, climate change, food, energy and innovation

7. Other policy initiatives relating to territorial policies, themselves contain reference to circularity, including (extensively) the Territorial Agenda 2030, and the 2020 Leipzig Charter, the Urban Agenda of the EU, and the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA). Those references should be congruent and complementary as each instrument is further implemented

8. The role of public authorities in developing CE applies not only to policy and practice but also to the governance arrangements needed to ensure inter-municipal and/or multilevel cooperation in this field. This needs to be, a) recognised in the relevant policy frameworks, and b) taken account of in practical support arrangements

9. European level funds and programmes should continue to support CE initiatives at the policy, practice, and research/science levels to ensure its further development and mainstreaming

10. Programmes might specifically look to incorporate support for initiatives designed to promote circularity building upon rural-urban interdependencies

11. European and national funds and programmes should continue to support both public authorities and businesses to facilitate implementation of the CE in partnership, including through the development of new business models with a rural-urban dimension

12. Where such business models are themselves designed to support the transition to a more circular economy, they should be entitled to receive appropriate public support where the implementation of those circular measures would otherwise put them in a disadvantaged position compared to other businesses in the same sector.

Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU)

1. The EU Urban Agenda is designed to ensure that urban interests are understood and taken into account across all areas of EU level policy. This is of critical importance, not only to urban actors and interests but to non-urban ones as well

2. Urban interests should not be conceived of as distinct from rural or peri-urban ones, in reality they are inextricably linked, as the work and findings of ROBUST have demonstrated

3. Indeed, when looking at the priorities within the Urban Agenda as reflected in the themes adopted by its various delivery partnerships, topics such as poverty, housing, sustainable land use, culture, and local jobs and skills are all of primary importance to rural and peri-urban actors and places as well

4. Any over-differentiation is to be avoided between urban and rural challenges, and indeed solutions to these challenges and many more, are hugely unlikely to be found by looking within territorial boundaries only

5. The UAEU sets out to strengthen the role of cites, but that role can only be played effectively by cooperating with proximitous and non-proximitous rural and peri-urban areas

6. The UAEU places considerable focus on multi-level governance, in common with ROBUST and much else, but that multi-level dimension needs to be applied across a range of stakeholders not all of whom are urban, as ROBUST's work has demonstrated in different thematic contexts – food, ecosystem services, cultural connections etc

7. In similar vein, the UAEU refers to strengthening urban policy through greater cooperation between cities, EU national governments and the EU itself, in reality though, urban policy is also strengthened through greater cooperation with rural and peri-urban actors, with whom they are interdependent

8. The UAEU entered a new implementation phase with the signing of the Ljubljana Agreement at almost exactly the same tine as the ROBUST project came to its end, November 2021. The Agreement suggests that "In times of disruption, it is in towns and cities where place-based, citizen-centred responses emerge and are applied". ROBUST's experiences suggest that such responses are not the sole preserve of towns and cities and that rural areas also play an active and important role

9. The confirmation within the Agreement of both food and sustainable tourism as new topics for thematic partnerships will hopefully act as timely prompts that such ROBUST-relevant topics, alongside many others, are in reality, more effectively addressed by taking a more rounded territorial approach.

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund (CF)

1. The 2021-27 ERDF and CF programmes will continue the 2014-20 approach of concentrating support and resource on priority thematic areas, around those of being more competitive and smarter, greener and more connected in particular

2. These priority concerns are of critical importance to territories of all types, but challenges and opportunities will look different in different places

3. Any over-association of ERDF and interventions in urban areas is antithetical to the broad principles of territorial cohesion

4. Rural and other non-urban areas should have fair and open access to ERDF and CF support as intrinsic and vitally important parts of the overall European territory

5. The Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030) should have a direct shaping impact on ERDF and CF programmes – ROBUST's work and findings suggests that the TA2030's emphasis on balanced territorial development taking due account of "territories with specific geographies", should be central to our thinking

6. TA 2030's focus on the importance and value of functional regions – as opposed to functional urban areas only – and on the circular economy, are key dimensions to which special attention should be paid in the development of Operational Programmes as testified to by ROBUST

7. The role of local and regional decision-makers in strengthening cooperation and reducing inequalities between places is pivotal in achieving balanced territorial development as highlighted within the TA2030 and reflected by ROBUST's own work on network governance arrangements

8. The increased proportion of ERDF in the 2021-27 programme to be allocated to "sustainable urban development (from 5% to 8%) should allow more work to be done on rural-urban co-operation

9. It is imperative that the sustainability of urban development is understood to include more and better cooperation and joint working with non-urban areas

10. Particular attention should be paid to the range of opportunities offered by the new Policy Objective 5 (PO5) of European Structural and Investment Funds within the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR). PO5 enables focus to be placed upon both rural and urban places and the relationships between them when designing ESIF interventions - a point of critical relevance in light of ROBUST's work and findings

11. PO5 is designed as new cross-cutting territorial tool, able to drive forward bottom-up territorial strategies, its use within ERDF and CF is an optimal way to develop and support joined-up rural-urban interventions and build synergies between territories of different types

12. PO5 offers the chance, which should be exploited to the full, to develop further territorial interventions in the form of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs), and Community led local development (CLLD) initiatives (now to be referred to collectively as Integrated Territorial Instruments), both inherently linked to bottom-up territorial development within or across administrative borders and highly congruent with ROBUST's areas of focus therefore

13. The scope to bring together funding from different programme sources within the updated Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) to form pooled resource within PO5 is welcome, and of potentially great value in supporting work across urban and rural areas – a point which by definition applies to ESF+ as well as ERDF with scopes to fuse investments across the two.

European Social Fund- ESF+

1. The European Social Fund 2021-27 is designed to support labour market interventions across all types of territories with a deliberative orientation around a more social and inclusive Europe – an orientation that needs to be kept clearly in view

2. Initiatives such as employment pacts operating across rural, peri-urban and urban areas are of proven value as demonstrated by the work and findings of ROBUST

3. Such initiatives will often work across administrative borders at regional and sub-regional levels – ESF programmes need to facilitate this cross-border dimension

4. Place-sensitive approaches need to be adopted at all stages of ESF+ implementation with focus placed upon the nature, assets and potentials of individual places

5. The key importance to local labour markets of rural-urban linkages should be a guiding tenet in designing ESF+ Operational Programmes (OPs) and in implementing their content

6. The short and longer-terms impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak upon rural-urban linkages and the changes in both job markets and working patterns that have resulted also need to be taken into account and various parts of ROBUST's work can be drawn upon in this regard

7. Key points of focus within the Territorial Agenda 2030 such as functional areas, development of the circular economy need to be explicitly brought into ESF+ Operational Programme design and implementation plans

8. The role of local and regional decision-makers in strengthening cooperation and reducing inequalities between places is pivotal in achieving balanced territorial development as highlighted within the TA2030 and reflected by ROBUST's own work on network governance arrangements

9. Particular attention should be paid to the range of opportunities offered by the new Policy Objective 5 (PO5) of European Structural and Investment Funds. PO5 enables focus to be placed upon both rural and urban places and the relationships between them when designing ESIF interventions – a point of critical relevance in light of ROBUST's work and findings

10. PO5 is designed as new cross-cutting territorial tool, able to drive forward bottom-up territorial strategies, its use within ESF+ is an optimal way to develop and support joined-up rural-urban labour market interventions and build synergies between territories of different types

11. PO5 development materials refer to the positive spill-over effects radiating from urban centres to "functional urban areas and rural areas close to cities", is in one sense welcome. ROBUST's

findings however suggest that those benefits apply in both directions, it is important that this be recognised

12. More positively, and these last two points apply to ERDF/CF as well as to ESF+, there has been specific reference to building on the "potentials and specific assets of non-urban territories ..." It is critical that this dimension remains part of the approach and is written into programme documentation at national and regional levels.

European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)

1. ETC (Interreg) is designed as an EU level instrument to support cooperation across regions and countries, as such it has particular value and scope to support territorial initiatives working across administrative borders

2. This is, in turn, well-suited as a means to support further transnational experimentation and knowledge-sharing on the rural-urban related topics upon which ROBUST has itself focused

3. In particular ETC allows for further valuable work to be done in identifying solutions to common problems and challenges such as those faced in managing rural-urban interdependencies and recontextualising these as opportunities for mutual benefit

4. ETC is about solidarity and is ideally suited to take forward rural-urban solidarity initiatives based upon principles of positive interdependency and exponential mutual benefit to be gained through

5. Better cooperation governance has been adopted as a new cross-cutting objective for the 2021-27 programme period. That emphasis on the centrality of governance is welcome and reflects the same importance placed upon it by ROBUST in exploring improved rural-urban synergies. One can usefully inform the other.

Next Generation EU – Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)

EU member states have each been invited to prepare their (national) recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs therefore) in line with a number of requirements set at EU level, for example allocating a minimum proportion of any financial sum sought to interventions designed to contribute directly to the green and digital transitions. NRRPs have to pass through a formal endorsement procedure carried out by the European Commission and then be approved by the EU Council. About 80% of NRRPs have been approved at the time of writing – November 2021.

1. The Next Generation EU initiative is an explicit response to the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak, and designed to mitigate its effects, as such it contains a focus on urgent interventions to start between 2021-23 within the framework of National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs)

2. The opportunity should be taken here to align RRF interventions (actions) with the reflections on the relative values, assets and importance of rural, peri-urban and urban which have arisen over the time of the pandemic

3. In particular, there are valuable opportunities here to take forward initiatives that reflect the sorts of rural-urban interdependencies and synergies which are more prominently on the policy agenda than previously

4. This will require an overt degree of shaping place-sensitivity interventions driven at the sub-national level in line with the principles around governance arrangements that RESTORE has itself explored over the time of the pandemic

5. It is also a key opportunity for individual EU member states to treat and implement the principles of the Territorial Agenda 2030 at an early stage of its existence
6. TA2030 pilot actions are already underway and could profitably be cross-referenced to what is being delivered through the RRF
7. The European Code of Conduct on Partnership (ECCP) could also be applied to RRF interventions so as to bring into play a ready-made mechanism designed to ensure sound governance at design, delivery and monitoring stages
8. Given the explicit references within the ECCP to the engagement of actors and interests across different types of territory, its use within RRF is of special interest and relevance to ROBUST
9. Greater involvement of a representative cross-section of local actors in general would bring a greater degree of place-sensitivity to delivery of approved RRF actions, the work of ROBUST suggesting that this can be a critical determinant of success
10. Particular attention should be paid to the interface between RRF interventions and other initiatives supported under funding support mechanisms with a territorial dimension - EAFRD and the EAGF in the case of rural actors and places and the EU cohesion policy programmes, but in particular ERDF and ESF+, in the case of all territories.

Smart Specialisation

1. Smart Specialisation Strategies (3S) and forthcoming Smart Specialisation Strategies for Sustainability (4S) are structured at the regional or national level. In that sense they are related to place and are developed to reflect the realities and potential of a given geographic location
2. What is less clear, and less overt, however, is the actual territorial dimension within any one 3S or 4S. They are of place but not necessarily about place. Strategies might be developed further in the future to reflect the territorial dynamics of any one area more strongly
3. They might, for example, pay greater attention to the urban – peri-urban – rural make up of individual strategy areas and look to develop a greater sense of the linkages and interdependencies between places of different types in the context of innovation
4. This might be done with special attention paid to the notion of functional areas as expounded within the Territorial Agenda 2030 so as to draw out the link beyond innovation and functionality
5. In particular, 3S and 4S operators are encouraged to consider the particular innovation opportunities related to rural-urban linkages and interdependencies
6. Synergising rural-urban linkages is a driver for innovation as ROBUST's work and findings demonstrate, this might be drawn upon and developed in future Smart Specialisation work
7. Using a model such as ROBUST's notion of "trajectories to synergies" might be mirrored within the Smart Specialisation initiative, exploring just how these trajectories can be developed through supporting innovation
8. Smart Specialisation Platforms, or other mechanisms, might be used as means to explore common findings across different 3Ss and 4Ss in these territorial regards and might encourage greater learning and knowledge-exchange between stakeholders in different strategies
9. As 3Ss and 4Ss are developed further they might become early adopters of the *rural proofing* mechanism as referred to in much policy work over the years and as recently highlighted as an area for further future work within the LTVRA
10. As *Rural Pacts* are developed as a key element of the evolving *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas*, they might be aligned with existing and new 3Ss and 4Ss to ensure that innovation is an explicit part of such agreements and that territorial cooperation is, at the same time, a more overt dimension of innovation strategies

11. Smart Specialisation might also more closely align its work with the experimentation and good practice with regard to rural innovation which is to be developed within the *European Startup Village Forum*

12. Smart Specialisation actors might also better build an overt territorial dimension into its work and approach by developing synergies with the Rural Revitalisation Platform in its work in developing collaboration between rural actors and interests across a broad range of subjects

13. The *New Industrial Strategy for Europe* and its 2021 update refer to the importance of "place-based innovation", this might be overtly cross-referenced in any future work and closer joint working undertaken

14. The *New Industrial Strategy for Europe* also explicitly refers to the encouragement to be provided to "place-based innovation and experimentation" – this should be teased out and operationalised in the context of Smart Specialisation and be applied beyond the 14 industrial ecosystems so far developed and set out in the Staff Working Document accompanying the 2021 *New Industrial Strategy* update.

EU Action Plan for Social Economy

1. The role of social economy initiatives in making rural-urban linkages deeper and wider has been explored and exemplified within ROBUST. One can inform the other as the *EU Action Plan for Social Economy* is published just at the point that ROBUST itself ends

2. As part of reaching a common understanding on the nature of social economy in Europe, ROBUST's work underlines the importance of bringing a clear territorial dimension to that work

3. The values and characteristics of social economy operators are linked to the particular places in which they work, this needs to be reflected in an evolving understanding of the nature and importance of their role in different types of places, urban, peri-urban and rural

4. The contribution of the social economy can be better captured if it is conceptualised as an element of territorial cohesion as well as of economic and social cohesion

5. ROBUST has provided examples of new and innovative ways in which social economy operators can work as part of a complex mixed-market of service provision in rural and rural-urban settings – this work can be further developed and contextualised as part of a broader territorial analysis

6. ROBUST has also provided insights into rural-urban specificities of the role of the social economy, this also can be developed further against the backdrop of the new *European Action Plan*

7. ROBUST's work on governance arrangements in particular, provides valuable pointers as to how it might be possible to build a conducive ecosystem for the growth of social economy operators as part of place-based governance arrangements both within, and across, administrative borders

8. The work done by ROBUST in looking at new and evolving business model profiles, includes pertinent examples with a social economy dimension

9. In particular, ROBUST has highlighted the need for new cross-sectoral interlinkages to be established between labour markets and social services as exemplified by the shared /social economy business model case studies it has developed – this work can also be expanded upon and used

10. Ongoing exploration of the nature and role of the social economy might usefully be set alongside ROBUST's own conclusions in terms of building economic models centred around wellbeing and the scope to shape economic activities with objectives beyond growth and profit

Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy (S&SM-S) and the Urban Mobility Initiative (UMI)

The S&SM-S was published in December 2020, setting out a vision for future European mobility and a series of staged milestones it plans to see successfully achieved by 2030, 2035, or 2050. One of 80+ provisions included within an action plan comprising part of the Strategy is for the 2013 Urban Mobility Package to be revised and a new version to be published in late 2021.

ROBUST's work has focused both on rural mobility and on the ways in which mobility systems and services might form a physical connection between rural and urban. It is not alone in focusing upon the rural-urban dimension and emphasising its central importance with regard to mobility and more generally: in its November 2021 "Bringing urban mobility to the next level" paper, the EUROCITIES network in calling for more work to be done on rural-urban connectivity suggests that "This would help align the future framework with the recent developments in rural cooperation, including the EU Rural Vision for 2040, the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the New Leipzig Charter. These strategies have put urban-rural collaboration at the core of territorial development in the EU" (The underlining is our own)

Policy recommendations:

1. Mobility policy should be integrated across rural, peri-urban and urban areas
2. Mobility policy should also be linked to other sectoral policies including measures relating to land use planning, protection of environment and climate change as well as local renewable energy
3. The net effect should be that EU mobility policy, strategies, and regulatory and support measures, should be territorially sensitive and support integrated solutions that serve residents of, businesses in, and visitors to, rural, peri-urban and urban areas – in all directions and in all combinations
4. Policy at each level - EU, national, regional and local - needs to be congruent in relation to the wider transport infrastructure including the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T), as well as with national, regional and local networks
5. A reappraisal of the way in which (urban) mobility nodes are used so as to better link TEN-T and regional transport systems would be beneficial in this context
6. The regional and local dimension of smart and sustainable mobility ought never be subjugated to considerations which are unduly weighted to the transnational and national levels
7. One key way in which to implement the joined-up policy approach is to work towards Intermodal regional transport hubs in rural and peri-urban areas as well as urban ones
8. Such hubs (with an emphasis on intermodal) serve as an efficient way to integrate urban and regional transportation networks that cover rural and peri-urban areas
9. That equivalence of importance of the transnational, national, regional, and local levels, needs to be directly reflected in funding and investment arrangements
10. Unevenness of investment and access to funds will at best result in uneven transportation and mobility systems and at worst in a fractured, disconnected set of systems and arrangements which fail to connect people and places and embed disadvantage and inequality of opportunity

11. Transport infrastructure and services constitute physical linkages within and between territories of different kinds. They can therefore ensure tangible synergies but at the same time may fail to do that or make those synergies harder to achieve

12. Mobility systems and services are inextricably linked to issues of accessibility – the absence of such systems and services being an obvious cause of exclusion, but also serving as a brake in terms of regional/local development

13. From a rural-urban perspective, transport and mobility connectivity is often addressed through the prism of commuting – this and other forms of mobility are extremely important for local and regional development …

14. …. But at the same time, rural-urban transportation and mobility issues extend way beyond commuting and ought not be over-characterised in that one simplistic way

15. Different types of territories face distinct challenges in terms of transportation and mobility systems and services. That needs not simply to be recognised, but acted upon in real ways if the European Green Deal (EGD) goal of leaving no-one behind is to be realised

16. It is imperative to think in terms of functional areas (and not only functional urban areas); transportation and mobility is a determining factor of that functionality (of course there is never only a single functionality in any one location)

17. Rural-urban transport and mobility considerations, often over-simplistically "swept-up" as part of functional urban areas, are, in reality, in many ways key parts of a complex web of functional mosaics, and a key connectivity point for urban and rural people and places

18. Innovation, similarly, is place-dependant and the development and use of innovative solutions will need to take account of different circumstances in different types of places

19. Transport infrastructure is the physical backbone of mobility, services should be conceived in such a way to maximise linkages and enable synergies not only between rural, peri-urban and urban areas but also within them

20. That last point constitutes a key element within more local/community resilience strategies and is important at that more general level also therefore

21. Transportation and mobility systems and services constitute important factors in the broader well-being of citizens, economic growth and territorial cohesion. They need to be regarded from that broader starting point

22. The lasting impacts and changes brought about by the pandemic are hard to forecast, but at least some elements of that change seem likely to persist

23. Some of these changes might be harnessed in a positive way (uptake of active travel modes post-lockdown, lower levels of commuting), as part of a more general strategy to achieve EGD goals

24. That need to keep broader EGD goals in mind should also act as a prompt to ensure adequate protection of green areas /open spaces and their biodiversity is considered while developing or enlarging transport infrastructure

25. Any plans to enlarge transport infrastructure should be calibrated against the current general public reluctance to use (shared) public transport which serves to drive down demand levels, congestion, and income ….

26. …. Each of those elements has implications both positive and negative

27. Such changes triggered (or at least accelerated) are, in turn, likely to impact on the demand for mobility service and its related infrastructure and the commercial viability of transport operations and operators

28. Mobility investment requirements will vary in different sorts of territories – it is therefore imperative that approaches to transport and mobility are place-sensitive and rooted in the principle of equivalence

29. Similarly, when thinking about cleaner and greener transport, it is vital to bear in mind that the scope and viability to use new forms of vehicles will vary from one type of territory to another

– typically most straight-forward to apply in densely-populated and built-up areas, we risk disadvantaging other places here if a broader territorial approach is not used

30. As regards the governance dimension - permanent governance bodies might be established to cooperate on issues relating to transport and mobility across rural, peri-urban and urban areas

31. These place-sensitive and inclusive governance bodies should be directly involved in the development of transport and mobility infrastructure and the provision of integrated public transport services

32. The role of such bodies should also be recognised by EU institutions in the shaping of programmes designed to implement policy, in their funding mechanisms and in the governance arrangements relating to those programmes

A New Industrial Strategy

1. The New Industrial Strategy refers to the need to be socially fair, and in this regard invokes the European Pillar of Social Rights as its "compass" in working through the twin transitions. Policy in this area needs not only to be socially fair to be spatially fair and to not advantage or disadvantage actors or interests of any one place unfairly

2. The strategy refers to the need for "a secure supply of clean and affordable energy and raw materials", such an assertion requires more work to be done in terms of determining the places from which these raw materials are to be sourced and where these sit within any rural-urban continuum

3. As the strategy also stresses the need to source raw materials from within Europe as opposed to from beyond it, it is important to quickly start developing a clearer picture of the nature and volume of these raw material requirements and their European territorial sources

4. The strategy highlights the role of industry in leading the ecological transition – that role is no doubt of great importance but requires a thoroughgoing assessment in terms of territorial impacts

5. Support should be given to the European Parliament's REGI Committee's earlier suggested addition to the 2020 EP Opinion on the New Industrial Strategy: "….investment in innovative means of production should foster cohesion amongst all EU regions, encouraging cooperation between rural and urban areas in the field of innovation and allowing them to accomplish fair and inclusive economic growth" (our underline)

6. The REGI Committee's reference to rural-urban cooperation might be extended beyond "fostering co-operation" to developing synergies and the most effective trajectories towards those synergies

7. The REGI Committee's proposal brings a vital territorial dimension into play and this needs to be embedded in all elements of the Strategy and its implementation

8. In common with the REGI Committee, ROBUST would also emphasise the positive role that might be played by innovative public procurement systems and by promoting public-private collaboration in achieving the Strategy's objectives

9. The Strategy's focus on the circular economy and embedding circularity across the economy is welcome. The particular role and value of harnessing rural-urban interdependencies in the context of circularity might be taken up by policy actors as a means by which to introduce a territorial dimension to this process

10. Particularly welcome is the Strategy's statement that "Place-based innovation and experimentation should be encouraged". Greater clarity should be brought to exactly what this means and how, and by whom, that encouragement happens

11. The encouragement to be provided to "place-based innovation and experimentation" referenced immediately above, needs to be applied in place-specific contexts such as the rural-urban

12. The Strategy calls for innovation to be "embedded in our policy making" so that "policies are innovation-conducive", that is welcome and implies the sort of facilitating that ROBUST's Living Labs have experimented with in different ways, it does however need to be applied in a place-sensitive way

13. One key aspect of "place-based innovation" remains *Smart Specialisation Strategies*, greater overt consideration of the urban - peri-urban - rural elements that go to make up regional or national S3s would bring a valuable new dimension here

14. The updated version of the strategy in particular, places great emphasis on "dependencies" in the sense of global supply chains and transportation links in light of Covid-19 impacts. What is missing here however is any consideration or analysis of exactly the same sort of dependencies at a more local territorial level – and in particular between proximitous and non-proximitous rural and urban areas within Europe. That also deserves attention.

15. The *Annual Single Market Report 2021* refers to the "proximity, social economy and civil security" industrial ecosystem and the role within that played by the social economy working in collaboration with others to "encourage inclusive green growth and quality job-creation, e.g., via socio-economic regeneration of disadvantaged areas. That focus on particular areas is welcome but requires contextualisation within a much broader territorial analysis including the respective roles of rural, peri-urban, and urban areas .….

16. …. And the ways in which exactly the "inclusive green growth and quality job-creation" referred to might be achieved through harnessing rural-urban interdependencies

17. The same two points immediately above should also apply to the *European Action Plan for the Social Economy* towards which the SWD signposts the reader

18. The "*Annual Single Market Report 2021*" when talking about the proximity, social economy and civil security" economic ecosystem (P161), highlights the role of Digital Innovation Hubs "with a specific focus on rural, remote, local, social enterprises and communities …". That might be cross-referenced and further expanded upon in light of ROBUST's work on service hubs and be applied to the future work of the *European Village Startup Forum* as well as the *Smart Villages* initiative to which the SWD itself refers

19. The reference in the same *Annual Single Market Report* (p162) to the importance of retail for "for the cohesion of rural and urban areas, in particular in preserving the vitality of city centres", also resonates with ROBUST's work on service provision and the explicit reference to rural-urban coherence is especially welcome, however that same rural-urban dimension might very usefully be applied to many other aspects of what the report addresses

20. Later, (at p163), the same report suggests that "the survival of retail SMEs is crucial for urban and rural local communities, as they offer proximity, are an important part of the social fabric and contribute to vibrant city and town centres". Again, the overt rural-urban reference is welcome, but especially welcome, and for future replication elsewhere, is the acknowledgment of mutual benefit across cities, other urban centres and rural areas.

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